

**Texas Department of Health**  
**Commissioner's Report to the Board of Health**  
**May 18, 2001**

**Lab Building.** The final Lab Building Project bid package (for site work, landscaping and signage) was issued on May 15. The General Service Commission is expected to award the bid in July. The building is 90% "dried in", therefore weather should no longer be a major factor in the construction schedule. Brickwork on the west end is complete as is interior wall framing for four floors. *For more information contact Tim Horn, Lab Office/Building Project, (512) 458-7780 or e-mail [tim.horn@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:tim.horn@tdh.state.tx.us).*

On April 26 the Legislative Budget Board approved an additional \$1.3 million of capital spending authority for the laboratory building project. The increase brings capital authority for the project to \$51.8 million. Most of the additional \$1.3 million will come from excess interest earned on proceeds of the laboratory project revenue bonds. *For more information contact Al Martin, Financial Services, (512) 458-7111, ext. 6929 or e-mail [al.martin@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:al.martin@tdh.state.tx.us).*

**PeopleSoft.** The Health and Human Services Administrative Systems (PeopleSoft) project is currently testing interfaces between the existing Legacy system and the PeopleSoft system. The conversion of the Legacy data to PeopleSoft is complete. Regional testing of end-user functionality began on May 14 with a pilot in San Antonio, and the projected completion date for testing in all regions is June 15. *For more information contact Linda Schirpik, Administrative Systems Project, (512) 458-7503 or e-mail [linda.schirpk@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:linda.schirpk@tdh.state.tx.us).*

**Workplace Violence.** A risk management work group on workplace violence has been organized to develop a comprehensive plan for TDH. The deadline for the plan is August 31. *For more information contact Liz Kovach-Hayes, Risk Management/Safety, (512) 458-7111, ext. 6481 or e-mail [liz.kovach@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:liz.kovach@tdh.state.tx.us).*

**Historically Underutilized Business (HUB) Usage.** TDH now has the highest adjusted HUB usage of any of the top 10 spending Texas state agencies. According to the General Services Commission, TDH HUB usage is up in FY 2001: 14.39% for August through February, compared to 12.3% for the same period in FY 2000. *For more information contact Al Beavers, Resource Management, at (512) 458-7111, ext. 3760 or email [al.beavers@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:al.beavers@tdh.state.tx.us).*

**Tobacco Control.** The Office of Tobacco Prevention and Control is working with the American Cancer Society, the Texas Commission on Alcohol and Drug Abuse and the University of Texas at Austin to conduct Communities of Excellence in Tobacco Control (CX) training in selected areas of the state. CX is a planning and implementation tool to aid communities in structuring tobacco control efforts. Target communities include Del Rio, Abilene, Midland/Odessa, San Angelo, Port Arthur, Beaumont, Harris County and Texarkana. The training is being conducted in May and June. *For more information please contact Diana Satterwhite-Condon, Tobacco Prevention and Control, (512) 458-7402 or e-mail [diana.satterwhite@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:diana.satterwhite@tdh.state.tx.us).*

**Respiratory Illness.** TDH is assisting the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in investigating an outbreak of acute respiratory illness reported in more than 200 college students from 18 states who had been to Acapulco, Mexico in March. Students from Texas Christian University, Southern Methodist University and UT Austin were affected. TDH is assisting in the identification and collection of data and the collection and analysis of clinical specimens. The initial impression is that the organism associated with this outbreak is *Histoplasma capsulatum*, but other organisms have not been ruled out. *For more information contact Neil Pascoe, Infectious Disease Epidemiology & Surveillance Division, (512) 458-7676 or e-mail [neil.pascoe@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:neil.pascoe@tdh.state.tx.us).*

**Influenza.** There have been no reports of influenza in the state since the week of March 17. This past flu season was marked by problems with vaccine production and delays in delivery, followed by a relatively mild flu epidemic. The flu season had distinct waves of circulating influenza types A and B. For the third year, TDH collaborated with Baylor College of Medicine in a Control of Epidemic Influenza Study. This study is funded by the National Institutes of Health and concludes September 2002. *For more information contact Neil Pascoe, Infectious Disease Epidemiology & Surveillance Division, (512) 458-7676 or e-mail [neil.pascoe@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:neil.pascoe@tdh.state.tx.us).*

**Foodborne Disease.** The investigation of a foodborne disease outbreak in a Dallas high school continued through April. It was discovered in a site visit that there had been an informally organized senior trip to Cancun, Mexico during Spring Break. Students interviewed prior to the site visit had not mentioned this trip. A follow-up questionnaire was given to seniors only. About 100 of the seniors went to Cancun, but of these only 29 provided complete information regarding travel and illness dates. The results from these students indicate that some students became ill while in Cancun. Students who remained in Texas did not become ill until at least the first day after Spring Break. TDH concluded that the source of the foodborne illness outbreak was a common food or water item consumed by about one dozen students in Cancun. The most likely infection source was ice. Lab results for specimens sent to CDC are pending. *For more information contact Linda Gaul, Infectious Disease Epidemiology & Surveillance Division, (512) 458-7676 or e-mail [linda.gaul@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:linda.gaul@tdh.state.tx.us).*

**TB Meeting.** A meeting was held in Harlingen on April 10 with representatives of the United States Marshals Service and members of state, regional and local tuberculosis programs to discuss the control and prevention of TB in situations involving apprehended persons with TB. *For more information contact Charles Wallace, TB Elimination Division, (512) 458-7447 or e-mail [charles.wallace@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:charles.wallace@tdh.state.tx.us).*

**TB Award.** On April 26 the Region 11 TB Program received the State/Community Coalition Award from the Association of State and Territorial Directors of Health Promotion and Public Health Education. This award recognizes the effectiveness of the collaborative effort between the Region 11 TB Program and a group of lay health workers who deliver directly observed therapy medications to patients in colonias. *For more information contact Charles Wallace, TB Elimination Division, (512) 458-7447 or e-mail [charles.wallace@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:charles.wallace@tdh.state.tx.us).*

**Texas Foreign Animal Disease Working Group.** Dr. Joe Garrett, Zoonosis Control Division, was appointed to the Governor's Texas Foreign Animal Disease Working Group. The task

force will plan responses to outbreaks of livestock diseases including foot-and-mouth disease. For more information contact Joe Garrett, Zoonosis Control, at (512) 458-7255 or e-mail at [joe.garrett@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:joe.garrett@tdh.state.tx.us).

**HIV/STD Statistics.** The HIV/STD Epidemiology Division reports the following statistics.

Texas Living HIV/AIDS Cases at the End of 2000		
Race-Ethnicity	Cases	Percent
White Non-Hispanic	13,657	42.8%
African American	11,342	35.5%
Hispanic	6,679	20.9%
Asian-Pacific Islander	130	0.4%
American Indian-Alaskan	62	0.2%
Not Specified	41	0.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>31,911</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

For more information contact Sharon Melville, HIV/STD Epidemiology, (512) 490-2545 or email [sharon.melville@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:sharon.melville@tdh.state.tx.us).

**Medicaid Waiver.** TDH continues to develop cost estimates on House Bill 896 and Senate Bill 1156 relating to a possible Medicaid waiver that would affect people living with HIV. Major considerations and changes to the proposed legislation include: hospitalization coverage; limits on the number of enrolled clients; and a mandate that participating counties obtain the match required for federal funds. HIV medications available through the Texas HIV Medication Program (THMP) will be provided through THMP rather than through Medicaid, and there will be a three drug limit on medications provided by Medicaid. The fiscal impact on general revenue and THMP would be minimal. For more information contact Linda S. Moore, HIV/STD Clinical Resource, (512) 490-2505 or e-mail [linda.moore@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:linda.moore@tdh.state.tx.us).

**STD Incidence.** TDH staff completed the STD Grant Epidemiologic Assessment for an end-of-year report to CDC. The report analyzes the incidence of STDs in Texas for 1999 and 2000. Syphilis continues to decline throughout the state, from 459 cases of primary and secondary syphilis in 1999 to 398 cases in 2000. However, an isolated increase in Bexar County in early 2000 created an apparent increase in syphilis among Hispanics statewide, from 15 percent of all cases in 1999 to 32 percent of all cases in 2000; Bexar County reported 67 cases in 1999 and 103 cases in 2000. In contrast, gonorrhea incidence remained almost constant. In 1999 statewide cases numbered 32,680, and 32,985 cases were reported in 2000. Chlamydia cases continued to rise, from 62,526 cases in 1999 to 68,758 cases in 2000. If the chlamydia increase was due to increases in unprotected sex, a similar case increase would have been expected in gonorrhea as well. Improved detection and reporting of chlamydia is a more likely explanation for the increase. For more information contact Sharon Melville, HIV/STD Epidemiology, (512) 490-2545 or e-mail [sharon.melville@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:sharon.melville@tdh.state.tx.us).

**Pilot Intervention.** HIV/STD Epidemiology Division staff began work on a pilot intervention program with eight HIV prevention contractors and their associated TDH central office

and regional field contract monitors to build skills and capacity to do “focused intervention design.” This process begins with increasing prevention staff’s knowledge of community-based assessment, allowing them to quickly compile information about the prevention needs of their communities. Training will also focus on the importance of understanding the factors that influence risk behaviors for these community members. The providers will then receive training in basic behavioral theory and how to match interventions with community needs. The pilot is being conducted with funds from the CDC, and TDH is working with the University of Texas Southwestern Medical School at Dallas to provide the training and technical assistance. The pilot will run through the fall. *For more information contact Sharon Melville, HIV/STD Epidemiology, (512) 490-2545 or e-mail [sharon.melville@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:sharon.melville@tdh.state.tx.us).*

**Inmate Educators.** TDH staff collaborated on a project with AIDS Foundation Houston to train 52 female inmates to be HIV/STD/HCV Peer Educators. The inmates were from five Texas Department of Criminal Justice women’s facilities. Trainers from the HIV/STD Health Resources Division helped deliver the weeklong curriculum, instructing the inmates on subjects such as hepatitis A, B and C; harm reduction; communication; and presentation skills. These peer educators will instruct other incarcerated women on risk reduction, behavior change and disease control. *For more information contact Casey Blass, HIV/STD Health Resources, (512) 490-2515 or e-mail [casey.blass@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:casey.blass@tdh.state.tx.us).*

**National Infant Immunization Week.** Texas Governor Rick Perry proclaimed April 22 – 28 Infant Immunization Week in Texas. At a press conference held at the People’s Community Clinic in Austin, First Lady Anita Perry spoke about the importance of immunizing children in Texas and increasing the immunization rates to 90% among children two years old and younger by the year 2005. Other immunization promotion activities were held in San Antonio, Dallas, Schlitterbahn Water Park in New Braunfels, Houston, El Paso, Garland, Amarillo, Galveston, Corpus Christi, Falfurrias, Lubbock, Laredo and other cities. *For more information contact Lupe Garcia, Immunization Division, (512) 458-7284 or e-mail [lupem.garcia@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:lupem.garcia@tdh.state.tx.us).*

**EMS Certification Exams.** In late March, the Bureau of Emergency Management (EMS) discovered that state EMS certification exams had errors in the answer keys. The work of identifying the potentially affected exams and individuals, re-grading the exams and taking action to correct the situation has been completed. Approximately 9000 tests were given during the timeframe. A total of 566 exams were identified as having the potential to move above or below 70 (minimum passing score); 361 actually did. The 172 persons whose grade changed from fail to pass were sent letters that included immediate certification and an offer to reimburse unnecessary administrative fees. The 62 persons whose grade changed from pass to fail were sent letters notifying them that they must pass a retest (at no charge) by June 30. The remaining 127 individuals took the exam as an evaluation tool for recertification and were sent letters notifying them of their change in score. The EMS constituency was notified when the errors were found and was recently provided a final status report. *For more information contact Kathy Perkins, Emergency Management, (512) 834-6700 or e-mail [kathy.perkins@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:kathy.perkins@tdh.state.tx.us).*

**Vital Statistics Burglary Investigation.** No arrests have been made in the continuing investigation of a January 29 Bureau of Vital Statistics break-in. Some \$2,375 in cash and checks and 3,316 sheets of security paper used to produce certified copies of birth and death certificates were stolen. The Austin Police Department and TDH Office of Investigations were notified immediately. The following state and federal agencies also were notified: Texas Department of Public Safety, Immigration and Naturalization Service, US Passport Services, Social Security Administration and the El Paso Intelligence Center. Additional security measures to decrease the likelihood of another break-in have been taken. *For more information contact Debra Owens, Vital Statistics, (512) 458-7366 or e-mail [debra.owens@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:debra.owens@tdh.state.tx.us).*

**Environmental Health Bureau Chief.** Claren Kotrla has been selected Chief, Bureau of Environmental Health. He served as Director, Toxic Substances Control Division in the bureau from April 28, 1996 to December 1, 2000, when he was named acting bureau chief following the resignation of John Jacobi. *For more information contact Joseph Fuller, Environmental and Consumer Health, (512) 458-7541 or e-mail [joe.fuller@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:joe.fuller@tdh.state.tx.us).*

**Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System (PRAMS).** The Associateship for Family Health has received a CDC grant award for PRAMS. The purpose of the PRAMS cooperative agreement is to assist state public health agencies in generating specific data for perinatal health programs and policies. This is accomplished by establishing state-specific, population-based surveillance of selected maternal behaviors and experiences that occur around the time of pregnancy and early infancy. The grant award, which was effective April 15, is for \$150,000 for 12 months. Total funding is anticipated to be \$750,000 during the five-year project period. *For more information contact Linda Bultman, Family Health Services, (512) 458-7371 or e-mail [linda.bultman@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:linda.bultman@tdh.state.tx.us).*

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## Public Health Region 2/3

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**Black Toxic Mold.** The Region 2/3 Toxic Substances Control Program continues to receive numerous phone calls regarding black toxic mold. Buildings in the Dallas/Fort Worth metroplex area -- including schools, animal control shelters, fire stations, libraries, office buildings, apartment complexes and homes -- continue to be shut down while the mold is abated. Schools are hiring industrial hygiene firms to perform surveys for indoor air quality problems and are finding significant problems with mold contamination. Many of the problems are associated with a lack of maintenance, poor construction materials and poor construction techniques. TDH continues to receive requests for surveys. All requests from homes, businesses and government agencies are being referred to private firms who perform these types of services. TDH surveys are focused on public schools. *For more information contact Kenneth W. McBride, Toxic Substance, (817) 264-4683 or e-mail [ken.mcBride@tdh.sate.tx.us](mailto:ken.mcBride@tdh.sate.tx.us).*

**Rabies.** Region 2/3 Zoonosis Control has recorded 259 cases of rabies-infected animals so far this year (through May 3). This is 52.5% of the rabies cases in the state. Region 2/3 is currently averaging 2.1 reported rabies infected animals per day. Last year there were approximately 1.04 cases per day, and Region 2/3 had 46% of the rabies cases in the state.

The majority of the infected animals are skunks. Local animal control officials have sent notices to newspapers and television stations. Written notices have been distributed in areas where rabies infected animals have been found, and fliers have been distributed to school children to take home to their parents. *For more information contact Connie Lindley, Zoonosis Control, (817) 264-4921 or e-mail [connie.lindley@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:connie.lindley@tdh.state.tx.us).*

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## **Public Health Region 6/5 South**

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**Foreign Animal Disease.** During April, Meat Safety Assurance Program staff communicated with local meat slaughter plant officials and TDH meat inspectors about two foreign animal diseases, bovine spongiform encephalopathy, also known as “mad cow disease”, and foot-and-mouth disease. These two foreign animal diseases have gained increased public attention during the past year. A presentation about meat safety concerns in cattle affected with these diseases was given to local meat inspectors and officials in the slaughter industry. There has never been a case of bovine spongiform encephalopathy in the US, and the last US cases of foot-and-mouth disease were in 1929. However, efforts have been made to improve awareness and surveillance in monitoring for diseased livestock. *For more information contact Alex Fisher, Meat Safety Assurance, (713) 767-3200 or e-mail [alexn.fisher@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:alexn.fisher@tdh.state.tx.us).*

**TB Cluster Investigation.** The Region 6/5S TB Elimination Program conducted a TB cluster contact investigation in Brazoria County after finding four TB cases in the same household in Angleton. After a thorough contact investigation, it was determined that these cases posed no threat to area residents. *For more information contact Syed Haidry, TB, (713) 767-3431 or e-mail [syed.haidry@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:syed.haidry@tdh.state.tx.us).*

**Dental Screening.** The Region 6/5S Dental Program, in partnership with the UT Dental Branch, the City of Houston and the Center for Health Promotion, Research and Development, provided dental screenings to 391 children in preschool, second, seventh and tenth grades in the Bay City Independent School District. The screenings were done in conjunction with the Innovative Tobacco Grant Seven County Decay Study to investigate alternative methods of predicting dental disease in communities in the Gulf Coast area. Evaluations were provided to parents about the condition of their children’s teeth so corrective actions could be taken. Additional screenings will be conducted through September. *For more information contact William G. Gray, Dental Health, (713) 767-3271 or e-mail [william.gray@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:william.gray@tdh.state.tx.us).*

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## **Public Health Region 7**

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**National Public Health Performance Standards (NPHPS) Survey.** Local health departments across Texas are being offered training in April and May on completing the NPHPS survey and on developing a system improvement plan. At least 45 local health departments have elected to complete the survey to satisfy funding requirements for FY 2001. A workgroup of Texas Association of Local Health Officials survey subcommittee members and regional and central office staff developed the training materials. The

NPHPS is a CDC-led nationwide effort to define standards of performance for local public health systems. *For more information contact Lisa McKamie, Community Oriented Public Health, (254) 778-6744, ext 2311 or e-mail [lisa.mckamie@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:lisa.mckamie@tdh.state.tx.us).*

**Distance Learning Center.** Region 7 has entered into a unique collaborative agreement with the Bell County Health Department to develop an interactive distance learning center. Funds for the purchase of the center's interactive communication equipment were provided by the TDH Health Alert Network project. The equipment will be installed in a recently renovated site for the Bell County Health Department. Regional staff will provide overall coordination of the center. This state-of-the-art center will be used for educational and in-service trainings, access to continuing education opportunities and staff development. *For more information contact Brett Marsh, Regional Administration, (254) 778-6744 or e-mail [brett.marsh@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:brett.marsh@tdh.state.tx.us).*

**Transportation Program.** The Region 7 Medical Transportation Program (MTP) has been collaborating closely with the regional Texas Health Steps Program to address the shortage of dental providers for Medicaid children in Bell County. MTP management staff met with Hill Country Transit to negotiate rates and transportation options for clients in Bell and McLennan counties who may need services out of their counties. Hill County Transit agreed to provide out-of-area transportation to Austin for these clients to get their dental care. *For more information contact Leslie Anderson, Disabled Children Services, (254) 778-6744 or e-mail [leslie.anderson@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:leslie.anderson@tdh.state.tx.us).*

**Managed Care.** The Regional Managed Care Coordinator is working with the Bureau of Managed Care on a Travis Service Delivery Area (SDA) Network Adequacy Workgroup. This workgroup was established in response to concerns that there are not an adequate number of providers or enough openings among current providers to serve newborns or new Medicaid patients in the Travis SDA. The workgroup is reviewing provider network data submitted by the Health Maintenance Organization Plans contracted in the Travis SDA. A phone survey of providers to determine plan acceptance and acceptance of newborns and new Medicaid patients was just completed. *For more information contact Jackie McLaughlin, Managed Care, (254) 778-6744 or e-mail [jackie.mclaughlin@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:jackie.mclaughlin@tdh.state.tx.us).*

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## **Public Health Region 9/10**

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**Community Planning Forum.** The Pan American Health Organization and the Region 9/10 Office of Border Health hosted a "Sister Cities" Community Planning Forum in Ojinaga, Mexico. The meeting allowed community leaders to prioritize bi-national health problems and formulate a plan to address them. *For more information contact Blanca Serrano, Office of Border Health, (915) 834-7690 or e-mail [blanca.serrano@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:blanca.serrano@tdh.state.tx.us).*

**Weapons of Mass Destruction.** Region 9/10 staff participated in Weapons of Mass Destruction Table Top Exercises in San Angelo and El Paso. The exercises were designed to evaluate community response system capabilities. *For further information contact Evret Newman, (915) 834-7782 or e-mail [evret.newman@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:evret.newman@tdh.state.tx.us).*

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## Public Health Region 11

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**Public Health, Customs, and Immigration Issues.** On March 7, the US and Mexican consuls for McAllen, Brownsville and Matamoros held a session to discuss public health, customs and immigration issues with state and federal border directors. These biennial meetings have fostered improved relations and allowed mechanisms to permit the movement of equipment and supplies for public health in Tamaulipas, and coordinated completion of therapy for multi-drug TB patients whose treatment was begun at South Texas Hospital. *For more information contact Brian Smith, Region 11, (956) 423-0130 or e-mail [brian.smith@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:brian.smith@tdh.state.tx.us).*